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Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade in accordance with General Assembly resolution 61/140.

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Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade

Report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Summary

In its resolution 56/116, the General Assembly proclaimed the 10-year period beginning on 1 January 2003 the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD).

At its halfway point, UNLD gives reason for cautious optimism regarding progress in youth and adult literacy rates, and has begun to put literacy higher on the international agenda. In places, national policies have led to more dynamic structures and increased funding for literacy. However, international support for literacy remains low. High numbers of non-literate young people and adults (774 million), particularly women, and slow advances in South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa remain of concern. The diverse contexts of marginalized populations need special attention. In today's knowledge societies, literacy needs continue to evolve across developing and developed countries, and will require greater commitment and further innovative efforts in the second half of the Decade.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–7	4
	A. Purpose and nature of the report	1–2	4
	B. Literacy: an evolving concept	3–4	4
	C. Literacy in a broader perspective	5–7	5
II.	Highlights of the first half of the Decade	8–14	5
III.	Literacy in the world today	15–32	7
	A. Evolving world and regional literacy rates	16–19	7
	B. Literacy learning	20–24	8
	C. Inclusive literacy	25–32	9
IV.	Key areas of action	33–68	11
	A. Policy	34–46	11
	B. Programme design and delivery	47–52	14
	C. Research, assessment and evaluation	53–62	15
	D. Advocacy for literacy	63–68	16
V.	Financing of adult literacy	69–83	17
	A. Literacy programme funding	69	17
	B. Sources of funding	70–78	18
	C. Costs of quality literacy programmes	79–83	19
VI.	Perspectives for the future	84–91	20
	A. Learning from experience	86	20
	B. Shaping the literacy agenda: the next five years and beyond	87–91	21
Annex			
	Adult (15+) regional literacy rates (1985-1994 to 2000-2006)		24

I. Introduction

A. Purpose and nature of the report

1. This report is submitted by the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in fulfilment of the request by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/140 that UNESCO "prepare and conduct the mid-Decade review in collaboration with all Decade partners during 2007 and 2008". This report, which follows those of 2004 (A/59/267) and 2006 (A/61/151), takes as its starting point the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literary Decade (UNLD) (see A/57/218 and Corr.1) and presents an assessment of progress in the areas of priority outlined there. The report captures the status, trends and challenges of literacy at the midpoint of the Decade, with a focus on non-literate youth and adults, i.e. those who have no or low literacy skills. The report also provides a framework for planning the second half of the Decade.

2. The right to education includes the right to literacy, an essential condition of lifelong learning and a vital means of human development. The vision of Literacy as Freedom and Literacy for All remains as relevant now as it was at the start of the Decade. Literacy leads to empowerment, a key to communication and learning of all kinds; it is a fundamental condition of participation and access to information in the knowledge societies of the twenty-first century. It remains a grave concern that one in five adults in today's world — 774 million in total — has no access to written communication through literacy, that 75 million children remain out of school, and that millions more young people leave school without a level of literacy adequate for productive and active participation in their societies. This situation is unacceptable; the challenge is urgent and compels all partners to deepen their commitment and strengthen their action. The second half of the Decade will focus on making this happen.

B. Literacy: an evolving concept

3. Literacy stakeholders recognize the multiple dimensions and the evolving nature of literacy, with new literacies emerging and changing patterns of learning, including the use of digital technologies. This has led to greater adaptation of provision to the needs and circumstances of learners and to higher levels of innovation.

4. In the first half of the Decade, evolving ideas about the nature of literacy have enriched debates, and informed policy and practice. Recent studies draw attention to the importance of social contexts and the sources of literacy inequalities. They highlight a continuum of literacy competencies and the existence of multiple literacies and practices, rather than a literate/illiterate dichotomy. Moreover, the concept of the literate environment has focused on the uses of literacy for new opportunities and active citizenship and has broadened the scope of literacy policy to involve work with the producers and users of everyday texts, rather than simply the providers of literacy teaching programmes. Concepts of adequate literacy and the literate environment are informed by rapidly changing modes of communication associated with digital technologies and globalization.

C. Literacy in a broader perspective

5. Literacy is a key condition for reducing poverty and achieving all the Millennium Development Goals; illiteracy rates are highest in the countries with the greatest poverty. Education is a major element of the poverty reduction strategy paper; however, a review of 18 papers revealed that, in most countries, plans included the education-related Millennium Development Goals but made little reference to adult literacy or non-formal education. Although the literacy rate of 15- to 24-year-olds, women and men, is an indicator of goal 2, the connections between literacy and poverty reduction were not directly addressed.

6. Literacy is a fundamental tool for learning of all kinds and therefore a cross-cutting issue in the six Education for All (EFA) goals; however, the specific goal on adult literacy (goal 4) has been seriously neglected. Literacy for All, situated at the heart of EFA in the Decade, has contributed to recent shifts in EFA policy (e.g. improving the quality, relevance and retention of skills within formal as well as non-formal education systems).

7. Other educational plans and initiatives reinforce UNLD by linking literacy with other aspects of learning. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) emphasizes the potential of education to influence our values, behaviour and the way we live, for which literacy provides a channel of expression. In 1997, the fifth International Conference on Adult Education set literacy within a new vision of adult learning based on the understanding that we cannot deal with global risks without an active and informed citizenship. The sixth International Conference will take place in May 2009 in Brazil, with literacy once again as a vital theme.

II. Highlights of the first half of the Decade

8. This section presents positive and encouraging highlights of the first half of the Decade while also noting areas where it has yet to develop its full potential.

9. The Decade serves as a rallying cry and banner for renewed international commitment to literacy. Ever since the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs in 1990 endorsed the expanded vision of basic education, which was reaffirmed in the six EFA goals adopted at the World Education Forum in 2000, the promotion of literacy for all age groups and as part of quality basic education has been an explicit international commitment. In setting up UNLD, the countries of the world were clearly determined to give literacy a still higher profile and stimulate greater efforts. At its halfway point, the Decade continues therefore to be a reference point and a banner under which to pursue even more vigorously the vision of literacy for all as the foundation of lifelong learning and a tool for empowering individuals and their communities.

10. New commitment to literacy has borne fruit through the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE). LIFE is a global strategic framework for collaborative action to enhance literacy efforts in 35 countries that have a literacy rate of less than 50 per cent or an adult population of more than 10 million without literacy

competencies.[1] Together, these countries represent 85 per cent of the functionally illiterate adults in the world. Coordinated by UNESCO through its Institute for Lifelong Learning, LIFE is already an effective catalyst for planning, capacity development, partnership-building and the mobilization of new funds for literacy.

11. A number of countries have taken important action in strengthening their literacy policies, which has led to a noteworthy decrease in the total number of illiterates. Larger changes in strategy within international development policies, in particular, attention to equitable growth, governance and social inclusion, have also given greater policy focus to literacy.

12. Fresh momentum, new policies and stronger institutions emerged from a series of regional and subregional conferences on literacy. In a number of countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, new policies put literacy higher on the agenda, in some cases with the creation of new ministries, budget increases and greater cooperation between departments. These developments were facilitated by a series of six UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy.[2] These events built on the initiative of the First Lady of the United States of America, Laura Bush, who organized the White House Conference on Global Literacy in September 2006 in New York in her capacity as Honorary Ambassador of UNLD. An outcome of the African Regional Conference, held in Bamako, for example, has been the active engagement of the First Ladies of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mozambique and Niger. Demands for greater regional collaboration emerged from all regions, an indication that the second half of the Decade should develop appropriate networks for these purposes. Identification of good practices and their dissemination have expanded the knowledge base on enabling factors for effective literacy programmes and promoted South-South cooperation.

13. Clearer evidence provides a stronger platform for promoting literacy. Recent editions of the EFA Global Monitoring Report have provided data and analyses which show the value and benefits of literacy and demonstrate the need for specific attention to literacy in terms of both policies and resources, with appeals to the international community to act commensurately with the challenge.

14. Improved methodologies of assessment and monitoring provide a better basis for planning and action. Traditional methods of assessing literacy levels among populations do not generate reliable data. The Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics is being piloted to arrive at a more complete and detailed assessment of current literacy levels, as a basis for better analysis of the challenge and more targeted action. In the area of literacy provision, the Non-formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS) developed by UNESCO has been introduced in eight countries. This system allows countries to map NFE and literacy provision as well as to monitor and evaluate the implementation of their NFE programmes and measure progress towards their literacy policy goals.

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[1] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Yemen.

[2] The Summary Outcomes of each conference may be accessed at: www.unesco.org/education/en/literacy/conferences.

III. Literacy in the world today

15. This section captures trends over the first half of the Decade, in terms of both quantitative and qualitative assessments of achievement and changes in conceptual and policy approaches to literacy. The following analysis is based on the statistics provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' web page (June 2008)[3] and provides a detailed statistical picture. This analysis is limited to comparing the periods 1985-1994 and 2000-2006 to indicate likely trends over time. Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

A. Evolving world and regional literacy rates

16. The number of adults who are not literate has been steadily decreasing: from 871 million during the period 1985-1994 to 774 million in the following period (2000-2006). Between these periods, the global adult literacy rate rose from 76 per cent to 83.6 per cent, with the largest increase occurring in developing countries (from 68 per cent to 79 per cent). However, these figures do not reveal the persistence of considerable regional, national and subnational disparities in access to literacy opportunities according to gender, age, ethnicity, location and economic status. Achieving literacy competencies that are adequate for the needs of today's knowledge societies also remains a concern in so-called developed countries.

17. The distribution of the 774 million non-literate adults in the world is of particular significance as more than 75 per cent of them live in only 15 countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Nigeria and four other high-population countries. In areas of high population growth, increased literacy rates do not necessarily indicate a decline in the absolute number of non-literate adults, as is the case in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of non-literate adults increased from 133 million to approximately 163 million, and in the Arab States, where the increase was from 55 million to 58 million. While youth literacy in all regions has increased more rapidly than adult literacy overall, certain areas saw increases in the number of non-literate young people due to high population growth and low school completion rates.

18. Looking at the regional picture (see annex), the greatest increases in literacy rates between the two periods were achieved in the Arab States and South and West Asia, with 13.8 per cent and 16.1 per cent increases respectively, as compared with 8.3 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 11 per cent in developing countries overall. Though Latin America and the Caribbean had only a 4 per cent average increase, the literacy rate was already over 86 per cent in the 1985-1994 period. Within the region, huge differences remain, with Guatemala having achieved only an 8.3 per cent increase between the two decades (from a literacy rate in the first period of 64 per cent) as compared with Argentina and Uruguay with over 95 per cent literacy rates in both periods. Among the Arab States, the highest increases in literacy can be observed in Egypt (an increase of 27 per cent), Algeria (25 per cent), Kuwait (18.8 per cent) and Yemen (20 per cent). Significantly, many of these countries had extremely low literacy rates in the earlier period (only 44.4 per cent of people in Egypt were literate in the period 1985-1994).

[3] http://stats.uis.unesco.org/.

19. According to projections from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the global trend towards higher literacy rates will show only a small improvement by 2015 (3.3 per cent from 2000 to 2006); based on current projections, the global adult literacy rate should reach about 86.9 per cent in 2015. Some bright spots include a projected reduction among females in the 15-24 age group, with the number of non-literates decreasing from 76 to 50 million. However, the proportion of women among all non-literate adults is expected to decline by only 1 per cent. Regionally, illiteracy among the 15-24 age group in South and West Asia is projected to decrease by about a third, from 67 to 46 million. However, three quarters of the 127 countries for which projections were calculated will miss the goal of halving adult illiteracy rates by 2015. Unless progress is significantly accelerated, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab States have a small chance of reaching this goal.

B. Literacy learning

1. Literacy in schools

20. Analysis of the effectiveness of literacy learning in schools cannot be separated from current debates about how to improve the quality of basic education in developing country contexts. Issues around the quality and relevance of primary education in particular have been associated with high drop-out rates, poor retention of literacy and other skills and the problems faced by school leavers in finding employment. Literacy is increasingly identified as a particularly important area of the curriculum for laying the foundation of success in other subjects too.

21. Various assessment programmes, for example the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; regional assessments, for example, the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education, the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality and the Programme of Analysis of Educational Systems; and national assessments, for example, the Sistema de Medición de Calidad de la Educación in Chile and the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the United States, give an increasingly detailed picture of the level of literacy in schools, both across regions and within countries.

2. Literacy learning outside schools

22. Programmes targeting young adults and out-of-school children face a particular challenge in addressing the reasons why participants dropped out of school, such as inflexible timing, irrelevant curriculum, expenses, unfamiliar language as medium of instruction and gender bias. Equivalency or "second chance" programmes have been developed specifically to cater for the needs of this younger group and aim to provide access to an alternative route for gaining the same qualifications provided in the formal sector. These programmes are a common feature in most countries. For example, the UNESCO-led Joint Malagasy Government-United Nations System Programme for the Promotion of Basic Education for All Malagasy Children offers as one of its components the "school of the second chance" where the primary school cycle is covered in 10 months instead of five years.

3. Learning new literacies

23. The new digital literacy has created a divide in developed countries that is even greater in developing countries where resources for textbooks and basic school equipment are already lacking. According to the 2008 World Education Indicators cross-national study *A View inside Primary Schools*, in 7 out of 11 countries, half the primary schools had no computers for pupil use and the allocation of resources varied greatly within regions.

24. In the adult education context, information and communication technologies have been promoted both in terms of content and as a means of enhancing learning. In Viet Nam, community education centres and teacher training colleges electronically share resources and tested practices in literacy programmes. The explosive growth of access to mobile phones has enabled non-literate adults to use text messages to enhance their livelihoods: for example, fishermen in Bangladesh have compared prices by texting to possible market purchasers. Television, video and radio communication continue to be important means of literacy training in remote areas. The *Alam Simsim* television series in Egypt teaches basic literacy and mathematics, as well as encouraging improved health, hygiene and environmental practices.

C. Inclusive literacy

25. Inclusive literacy is not just about how to target literacy or schooling interventions effectively for specific marginalized groups, but also about the impact that literacy can have on transforming traditional gender, socio-economic and political inequalities within and between communities. Many of the characteristics of the groups mentioned below combine to increase marginalization, often exacerbated by rural/urban differences. There is also concern that "absolutely" non-literate people may be least able to benefit from literacy programmes, and this requires urgent attention.

1. Literacy and gender

26. There is a striking difference between the discourse on literacy and gender in developed as compared to developing countries. In developed and some middle-income countries, educators are concerned about boys' relative lack of achievement in literacy in schools. By contrast, in developing countries, policy has focused on women's and girls' marginalization from education, as signalled by the gender gap in adult literacy rates. This has hardly changed between the two periods (63 per cent of non-literate adults were women in 1985-1994 as compared with 64 per cent in 2000-2006). In both contexts, however, most emphasis has been placed on how to change structures, curricula and teaching approaches to ensure greater participation of the marginalized group (men or women) and rarely about how to use literacy to challenge or raise awareness about gendered assumptions, practices and texts.

27. Responding to research revealing the correlations between women's literacy and health improvements, many literacy programmes have specifically targeted women in their roles as wives and mothers and adopted a functional literacy approach. The Yemen Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Education programme combined literacy instruction with skills development in agricultural production, savings and loan clubs, environmental management, maternal and child health (including HIV

and AIDS awareness), political participation and women's rights. Within a rights-based approach to women's empowerment, literacy has a key role in emphasizing women's multiple identities and in leading to greater socio-economic and political participation.

2. Literacy and poverty

28. Poverty is strongly related to high illiteracy rates and gender inequalities. In Egypt, illiteracy rates for poor children are more than twice the rate among non-poor children. Poverty's impact on literacy surfaces in numerous ways. For example, the poorest participants in literacy programmes drop out of classes or do not enrol in the first place, and poor parents typically sacrifice their own education so as to ensure their children's. In Malawi, the hunger crisis of 2005/06 meant that income-generating activities linked to functional literacy (such as rearing pigs), within the Sustainable Social and Economic Empowerment Programme for Poverty Reduction, could not compete with producing food for people. Special attention must be given to literacy in rural areas, where most of the adult non-literate population of the world lives and where opportunities for quality learning and literacy acquisition are often less available. At the same time, there is an increasing need for literacy as a tool for rural development. Examples of good practices are the rural expansion of the Community-based Healthcare (REACH)/Learning for Life programme in Afghanistan which linked literacy with local services, for example by training women as paid community health workers, as well as the International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education in China.

3. Literacy and language

29. The opportunity to learn in one's mother tongue as well as learning to speak a language of wider communication was identified as an important human right in the UNDP *Human Development Report 2004*, to ensure that people are not excluded from education, political life and access to justice.

30. Decisions about which language to use are often influenced by limited resources for literacy and the implications of developing or translating learning materials into the languages spoken by a particular group. In West Africa, most initial development of local language publications has been initiated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in collaboration with national Governments. In countries where there is a multitude of languages, such as the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, great efforts have been made to ensure the use of mother-tongue instruction.

4. Literacy for specific groups

31. Literacy rates among indigenous groups, nomadic communities, child soldiers, working children and adults with disabilities remain comparatively low in many countries. Access to literacy learning is an aspect of the fulfilment of their broader human rights. As they continue to be excluded from mainstream education, some Governments have built an adapted curriculum to integrate them through non-formal education. The Sudan, for example, targets former child soldiers for non-formal education with the aim of rehabilitating these young people into mainstream society through a specialized curriculum. The growing number of non-literate or semi-literate young people has become a serious concern. For example, in the 1995-2004

period, there were an estimated 73 million young people in this category in South-West Asia.

32. Literacy interventions in the area of HIV and AIDS have offset social discrimination and taboos: as a result of the REFLECT programme in Orange Farm, South Africa, some participants tested for HIV and disclosed their status to each other and their families. In situations of post-conflict and post-disaster, literacy efforts reach those whose educational opportunities were curtailed as, for example, the Accelerated Learning Programme for Youth in Iraq and the LIFE focus on women in Afghanistan.

IV. Key areas of action

33. This section reports, under four major headings, on the key areas of action proposed in the UNLD International Plan of Action: policy; programme design and delivery; research, assessment and evaluation; and advocacy for literacy. Issues of capacity development and community participation are dealt with as cross-cutting issues.

A. Policy

1. Government policies: formulation and trends

34. Many national Governments have taken the lead in the development of literacy policy, for example, in developing their literacy situation analysis and integrating adult literacy into education plans and poverty reduction strategies. The strong response to LIFE illustrates the commitment of many countries to literacy.

35. There are strong policy commitments to youth and adult literacy within some countries. These include countries which have run national literacy campaigns in the first half of the Decade, such as Nigeria, India and Venezuela, while China's consistent policy over the last 15 years has given over 90 million people access to literacy. In countries participating in UNLD initiatives (e.g. the UNESCO regional Literacy Conferences in Support of Global Literacy, LIFE and LAMP), literacy is now higher on the national agenda.

36. In 2004, Morocco adopted a national literacy and NFE strategy, in the context of an integrated vision of literacy, development and poverty reduction, and in 2005 Niger issued a ministerial decree for the development of a new NFE policy which includes adult literacy. Mauritania put its National Strategy for the Eradication of Illiteracy into an operational workplan in 2006, linked to the poverty reduction strategy. In the Gambia, adult literacy has been integrated into the education policy and the policy reduction strategy paper.

37. Similar policy shifts are observed in many countries of South and West Asia, particularly in India and Bangladesh, where new literacy initiatives are integrated into the overall human resource development framework. The establishment of community learning centres in India and Afghanistan, non-formal basic education community schools in Pakistan and non-formal basic education centres and mass literacy centres in Bangladesh is illustrative of this trend. India further reinforced

policy through a drive to reduce residual illiteracy aimed at around 36 million non-literates between 2005 and 2007.

38. Further examples of increased policy commitment include Malawi (a revised National Literacy Policy), Senegal (with a threefold budget increase and a new national website on literacy), Benin (greater integration of action in literacy as part of EFA plans), Mali, Burkina Faso (a national task force to mobilize funds) and five further LIFE countries (Niger, Egypt, Morocco, Bangladesh and Pakistan), with national action plans developed in eight countries (Haiti, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Morocco, Bangladesh and Pakistan).

39. Through the regional meeting on the implementation of LIFE held in Maputo in 2008, the African Union demonstrated increased policy commitment to adult literacy and is considering an African charter for literacy and languages. South-South cooperation is growing, including Brazilian support for capacity-building in Haiti and Lusophone African countries, as well as Cuba's technical support to many Latin American countries and beyond.

40. In general, attention given to literacy in the EFA 2006 and 2008 Global Monitoring Reports and initiatives such as LIFE and the regional conferences have made a positive impact on the policymaking environment. One major challenge is that policy emphasis on the Millennium Development Goals led many Governments and donor organizations to prioritize universal primary education (UPE) over their broader EFA commitments, including adult literacy. Indeed, many national Governments and donor organizations have viewed primary education as the most efficient vehicle for achieving increased levels of literacy. This logic is explicitly stated in many policy documents, but often without sufficient modelling and analysis. As a result, low levels of adult literacy do not automatically result in higher policy commitments to adult literacy.

41. The LIFE programme supports increased policy commitment at national and international levels, including the development of country profiles, needs assessment, literacy capacity-building, and institutional development for programme design, management and delivery. Since responsibility for literacy is often spread across several ministries at the national level, there is a clear need for strong inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination.

42. In 2007, UNESCO facilitated regional studies on civil society organization (CSO) engagement in EFA policy formulation, through the NGO Collective Consultation of NGOs (CCNGO) on EFA. These studies showed that partnerships between civil society and Government have grown substantially. For example, 345 agreements were signed with NGOs in Morocco during 2006 by the ministry responsible for literacy. The "CCNGO Survey on CSO in EFA — Asia Pacific 2007" report, covering 11 national CSO coalitions, indicated CSO involvement in Government policy formulation to varying degrees, with some success in raising the profile of literacy and non-formal learning, for example in Bangladesh, India, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

2. Policies of multilateral institutions and donors

43. Within the multilateral system, support for literacy for youth and adults is embedded in the respective mandate of each agency. However, agency priorities do not yet adequately reflect the thrust of the Decade. UNESCO, as the specialized

agency for education and coordinator of the Decade, initiated three programmes within the Decade: the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), the Literacy Monitoring and Assessment Programme (LAMP) and the Non-formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS), all of which are detailed in other parts of this report. The United Nations Population Fund is particularly concerned for women's access to literacy and for the part it plays in giving access to information and learning on reproductive health, while the United Nations Children's Fund supports adult (female) literacy programmes and, in some contexts, non-formal equivalency programmes for out-of-school adolescents, which include literacy and numeracy. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations focuses on rural people and has promoted literacy among farmers and fishermen, linked with basic technical skills. In terms of offering education to child and adult refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees facilitates access for refugees to the local school system, as for example in urban environments, and cooperates with NGOs in adult learning programmes as well as refugee camp education programmes. The World Bank is the largest external funder of education, with a focus on UPE. Its engagement with youth and adult literacy is less developed, with some commitment based on the instrumental role of adult literacy in expanding primary education, and in processes of poverty reduction and economic growth. This is illustrated by recent investments in adult literacy, e.g. in Senegal, Chile, the Gambia and other countries, and in NFE in Iraq.

44. Other agencies, such as the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization, also have complementary concerns where literacy plays a role in access to information and work opportunities. Stronger networking and partnerships which leverage these comparative advantages are vital for fulfilling the UNLD goals.

45. Donor agencies integrate literacy to varying degrees into their policies on support to education. The policy documents of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have strongly advocated investment in literacy. This includes major initiatives, such as congressional budget support in 2008 for a number of important literacy initiatives in developing countries. Similarly, the Swedish International Development Agency policy includes support for Government Adult Basic Learning and Education programmes when they are based on clear political will at the national level. In 2007, the Organization of American States articulated a determined policy to promote universal literacy throughout the region. Spain is committed to support the Ibero-American plan for literacy, which also is part of the educational policy of the Organization of Ibero-American States. The European Commission[4] gave renewed emphasis internally to adult learning, urging its member States to develop a culture of lifelong learning, but this approach has not yet fed through to its international cooperation policy.

46. It is also important to recognize the important role of advocacy organizations in influencing policymakers. These include the Global Campaign for Education, which contributed significantly with the production of International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy,[5] and the Centro de Cooperación Regional para la Educación de Adultos en América Latina y el Caribe in Latin America.

[4] European Parliament Resolution of 16 January 2008, "Adult learning: it is never too late to learn".

[5] *Writing the Wrongs: International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy*, ActionAid International and Global Campaign for Education, November 2005.

B. Programme design and delivery

1. Delivering quality programmes

47. There have been improvements in modes of design and delivery and in pedagogy. These go some way towards answering the concerns of donors and others who look for higher quality of delivery and management in literacy programmes. Greater understanding of the diversity and context of literacy has led to more flexible implementation.

48. In programme design and delivery, the main challenge is to increase the scale of delivery, while adapting management systems, content, teaching methods and materials to respond to diverse contexts and needs. The multiple and diverse methods and approaches used in literacy teaching are a strength, responding to various contexts and population groups. In the first half of the Decade, there has been a growing recognition of the value of linking literacy learning directly to real-life uses of literacy and real-life texts and learner-generated materials. Information and communication technologies have transformed the ways literacy materials are produced, enabling rapid modifications of materials to suit the needs of diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

49. The first half of the Decade has witnessed a good deal of innovation in pedagogical methods in literacy. "Initial literacy" includes conventional primer-based approaches, family literacy such as the Save the Children US programme Reading with Children (e.g. in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan), the *Yo si puedo* method in some Latin American countries and other regions, community literacy and social literacy approaches (e.g. in India and Nepal), REFLECT (in at least 55 countries), those based on the Laubach "each one teach one" method (Bangladesh), critical literacy and legal literacy (Scotland, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone), and intercultural and multilingual literacy (e.g. Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Senegal, South Africa). Some approaches adopt a campaign mode, while others involve national programmes or community-based initiatives. There are approaches that include the use of new information technologies and specialist methods developed for working with people with disabilities, learning difficulties and dyslexia. Family and intergenerational programmes have met with success, for example, in Pakistan, Turkey and the United States.

50. In many cases, literacy programmes are moving away from standardized materials and centralized delivery and towards more localized approaches. Innovations include shorter courses of focused instruction, literacy camps, in situ learning linked with wider socio-economic activities and work-based learning, and longer instruction linked to "post-literacy" courses and community learning centres.

2. Learning materials and new technologies

51. New information technologies enable more localized and flexible approaches towards materials development, including materials that are adapted to suit diverse cultural and linguistic groups. This is especially important for "initial learning" of "absolutely" non-literate learners, where a more structured approach to instruction is required. In the Sudan and Vanuatu, for example, NGOs have given special attention to addressing the dearth of reading materials.

52. Learner-generated materials can now be rapidly edited and reproduced using computer-based software and translated into local languages or bilingual formats. Examples include CD-based materials in Nepal that enable local adaptation for linguistic and cultural variation and in REFLECT, where participative material production is integral to the method.

C. Research, assessment and evaluation

53. One of the outcomes of the first half of the Decade has been to recognize the importance of research; this plays a key role in adult literacy and in the identification of literacy needs and aspirations, informing programme design, helping to improve quality and providing evidence of benefits.

1. Research

54. In addition to financial challenges, a major challenge in UNLD is enhancing research capabilities to enable improvements in literacy programme efficacy. Unfortunately, there is a lack of investment in research on adult literacy and insufficient collaboration between university departments and literacy providers. Some of the most pressing areas for research are: national-level assessments; research on the uses and impact of literacy; responses to linguistic diversity and changing literacy environments including digital literacies and information and communication technologies; and costs and benefits to improve programme quality. There is also scope for synergies between research on children's education and adult literacy (e.g. intergenerational benefits).

55. There have been significant improvements in the first half of the Decade in the application of qualitative research in literacy programmes. This includes the incorporation of ethnographic research into programme design, planning, implementation and evaluation. There are two major developments in this area: first, literacy programmes are increasingly informed by a recognition of the diverse social uses of literacy, including multiple scripts and languages; second, the integration of ethnographic and participatory research methods is being established as a characteristic of good practice.

56. While many countries with low adult illiteracy have strong research capacities, those with high levels of adult illiteracy often have weak institutions and capacities for literacy research. In order to achieve the UNLD aims, there is a need for major new investments in literacy research, including funding for (a) key programmes of research; and (b) long-term institutional development to enhance research capacities at the national, regional and international levels.

2. Assessment, monitoring and evaluation

57. The number of years of schooling has been shown to be a poor indicator of literacy levels. Improved literacy assessment will enable better mapping and analysis of the literacy situation in a given population and literacy needs. This requires better-quality data, and expanding the scale and coverage of literacy assessment.

58. For quantitative assessment of literacy levels among populations, "direct assessment" testing is steadily replacing "self-reported" assessment and the reliance

on census data; this enables analysis of literacy capabilities and inequalities by providing information on "levels" of literacy.

59. In this perspective, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is developing the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, an assessment of literacy in the information age, understood as the "interest, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use socio-cultural tools, including digital technology and communication tools, to access, manage, integrate and evaluate information, construct new knowledge, and communicate with others". It will be operational in 2011, focusing principally on OECD member States. This builds on the International Adult Literacy Survey, the largest comparative survey of adult literacy ever undertaken (1994, 1996 and 1998), and on the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (2003 and 2005).

60. At the national level, several States have conducted their own surveys, for example Austria, China, France, Kenya and the United States. The Kenyan survey drew on the LAMP methodology (see below) in an innovative approach to determining more precisely actual levels of literacy competence.

61. UNESCO is developing new approaches to adult literacy assessment through LAMP. This methodology is being developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and is being piloted in El Salvador, Kenya, Mongolia, Morocco, Niger and the Occupied Palestinian Territories to arrive at a comprehensive and detailed assessment of current levels of literacy among populations, as a basis for better analysis of the challenge and more targeted action, and to develop national assessment capacity.

62. NFE-MIS has been developed by UNESCO based on the need to provide data on NFE programmes at the national level. The objective of NFE-MIS is to provide policymakers and planners with reliable, relevant and timely data to allow for informed decision-making, better planning and improved monitoring; building capacity and creating a culture of monitoring are essential in this.

D. Advocacy for literacy

63. The General Assembly gave the coordinating role for UNLD to UNESCO, in particular to "stimulate and catalyze the activities at the international level within the framework of the Decade".[6] Within the international EFA movement, the EFA High-Level Group, the principal mechanism for generating political will, addressed literacy as its theme in 2005, but stopped short of recommending any specific measures to increase efforts and investment in literacy.

64. The annual EFA Global Monitoring Report has consistently reported on progress in literacy, seeking to improve the quality of the data it uses and monitoring closely the fourth EFA goal: increasing adult literacy rates by 50 per cent by 2015. Each year, this report provides a detailed and increasingly disaggregated set of literacy statistics, serving as a platform of evidence for assessing how likely the achievement of the EFA literacy goal is. These statistics have led Global Monitoring Reports to characterize lack of literacy progress as a

[6] See resolution 56/116.

"disgrace" and a "scandal", a situation that the second half of the UNLD must address.

65. In order to demonstrate the multiple uses and value of literacy, the Decade adopted five biennial themes, which have been the focus for particular advocacy efforts: literacy and gender (2003-2004); literacy and sustainable development (2005-2006); literacy and health (2007-2008); literacy and empowerment (2009-2010); and literacy and peace (2011-2012).

66. With regard to civil society, advocacy for literacy took a step forward in February 2007 when the High-level Workshop on Adult Literacy, held in Abuja, adopted a Call for Action which promoted a benchmarking approach to literacy planning, providing a platform both for more focused advocacy for literacy and for stronger partnerships. In 2009, the Global Campaign for Education will take adult literacy as its theme for Global Action Week.

1. International literacy prizes

67. The UNESCO international literacy prizes reward outstanding efforts in the field of literacy and non-formal education throughout the world. The three prizes are: the International Reading Association Prize, the King Sejong Prize (Republic of Korea) and the Confucius Prize (China). Since the beginning of the Decade, these prestigious prizes have rewarded literacy projects and programmes undertaken by Governments and NGOs that stand out for their excellence and innovation at the national level or acting more broadly. The prize winners are mainly from developing countries; since the start of UNLD in 2003, literacy efforts in Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Cuba, India, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Spain, South Africa, the Sudan, Turkey, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States have been honoured.

2. International Literacy Day

68. International Literacy Day is celebrated every year on 8 September. It is an opportunity to remind the international community of the status of literacy and adult learning globally, attracting worldwide attention to this neglected goal. Each year, Governments, civil society and the international community therefore focus their advocacy activities on a particular topic, following the biennial themes of UNLD. To celebrate the Day, the international literacy prizes are awarded in a public ceremony often held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

V. Financing of adult literacy

A. Literacy programme funding

69. Some current signs of increased funding for youth and adult literacy cannot mask the relative neglect observed during the first half of the Decade. The challenges in literacy are not simply financial, but lack of adequate finance remains the most important barrier to progress. This affects programme costs and constrains higher-level institutional investments in programme quality, innovation, sustainability and research.

B. Sources of funding

1. Government funding

70. Financial commitment from Governments is the main source of funds for literacy and one that is most readily sustained and integrated in national education plans. Despite progress in levels of financial support for basic education by national Governments, priority has been given to the achievement of UPE. The interconnected nature of adult literacy with the other EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals means that lack of financial commitment for literacy will reduce the scope for achieving the other goals. In the surveys undertaken for this report, many Government and civil society literacy providers identified lack of finance as a key concern.

71. Many countries only spend 1 per cent of their national education budget on adult literacy. A benchmark of a minimum of 3 per cent of education budgets for adult literacy has been promoted by the Global Campaign for Education and ActionAid, at the Abuja High-Level Workshop and within LIFE.

72. Many middle-income countries are able to meet their own financial needs for adult literacy. This includes some of the countries with high numbers of functionally illiterate youth and adults (such as Brazil, China and India). India increased its adult literacy expenditure by 50 per cent in 2008-2009 and had planned to multiply the allocation threefold. During the first half of the Decade, several countries participating in LIFE have increased their budgets for literacy. For example, Burkina Faso increased the share of education funding for literacy from 1 per cent to 7 per cent, in Senegal the budget increased from 1 per cent to 3 per cent, and in Mali, it increased from 500 million to 4 billion CFA francs.[7] Several countries have established new national funds for literacy, enabling support from a diversity of funding providers, and integrated adult literacy into national education plans.

73. The lack of financial capacity severely undermines progress in literacy. There are three reasons for such lack of financial commitment: resource constraints; technical constraints (e.g. in assessment and financial planning); and an unfavourable policy environment.

2. Funding from bilateral and multilateral organizations

74. In the first half of the Decade, donor policy has largely favoured the achievement of UPE and this has been a brake on progress towards UNLD objectives. This emphasis has been particularly evident in the EFA Fast Track Initiative which has allocated minimal funding thus far to EFA goals other than UPE. The picture, however, is not entirely bleak. LIFE has helped to access funds from bilateral and multilateral agencies to meet funding shortfalls and support a major literacy drive (e.g. in Afghanistan, Mauritania, Niger and Papua New Guinea). Through UNESCO, Afghanistan is receiving a $13 million aid package from Japan to improve literacy, which will benefit 600,000 non-literate youth and adults. In Benin and Burkina Faso, Governments argued vigorously for and secured some literacy funding from the EFA Fast Track Initiative.

[7] See www.unesco.org/uil.

75. There are also many important examples of bilateral and multilateral agencies working with Governments to improve institutional capacities and provision, such as European Union support in Mauritania, Swiss support in Burkina Faso, and support from the Government of Japan for Papua New Guinea. The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation supports adult literacy programmes in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru. On the basis of a sector-wide approach, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom bases its support on its 2001 position that improved adult literacy encourages parents to send their children to school and provides ongoing assistance for literacy including programmes in Uganda, Yemen, India and China, as well as specific commitments to increasing literacy provision in South Asia. USAID has made investments in adult literacy, family literacy and non-formal education, including programmes in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kosovo.

76. There are some major limitations to and weaknesses in the financial support from bilateral and multilateral donor organizations:

(a) The scale of financial assistance has in general been clearly insufficient to meet the adult literacy challenges of UNLD;

(b) Capacity and institutional mechanisms on the whole are not friendly towards enabling funds to be dedicated to adult literacy; this has most clearly been evident in the EFA Fast Track Initiative;

(c) Sustained commitment to literacy has generally been lacking.

3. Civil society and private sources of funding

77. In a 2008 survey of civil society organizations carried out by UNESCO, less than half of the organizations reported receiving funds from Governments. Most relied on multiple sources of funding from international donor organizations and other sources. Many of the organizations viewed inadequate access to funds as a challenge, citing funding problems including the continuity of funding and insufficient funds to enable responses to expressed needs.

78. Private organizations (e.g. multinational corporations, philanthropic foundations, private donors, religious organizations, individual and community benefactors) provide an important additional source of funding for literacy programmes; however, there are few figures on the extent to which such sources of funding contribute to literacy programmes.

C. Costs of quality literacy programmes

79. In the first half of the Decade, there has been some progress in terms of costing literacy programmes, with a growing consensus (based on surveys of international experience) that unit costs of literacy programmes should be between $50 and $100 per learner per year, with higher costs being associated with higher quality and returns.

80. Caution is required, however, in comparisons of costs because of differences in what is included and excluded and the outcomes that one might reasonably expect, as documented in a range of studies of countries such as Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Indonesia, Namibia, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Turkey

and Uganda. In Brazil, research showed that costs range from $40 to $182, but warned that low costs undermined the ability of programmes to maintain norms of provision such as contact hours. The figure of $50-100 per learner probably also underestimates the cost of human resources and institutional development, e.g. initial and in-service training, professional development, research capacity, venues and equipment, areas where neglect undermines quality. Capacity development in all areas of literacy provision is one of the major areas that requires higher levels of funding.

81. The costs of illiteracy, even though not yet well understood,[8] must be factored into the assessment of literacy programme costs, the cost of doing nothing, or of doing something badly, may be as much as the investments that are required.

82. Literacy needs are not static. They change and evolve (e.g. to accommodate new technologies, languages, economic situations), and require ongoing investment. Financial commitment to EFA goal 4 should therefore combine immediate efforts to achieve the goal, with a commitment to long-term, sustained funding of literacy programmes (including institutional and research capacities, and budget support mechanisms) as an ongoing commitment to adult literacy as a human right and a key intervention in human development.

83. It is estimated that at least $2.5 billion would be required annually, involving investment in adult literacy by national governments and donor organizations.

VI. Perspectives for the future

84. We need a new agenda for literacy, one that firmly embeds literacy in the right to education and the goal of sustainable development. Literacy is always part of the wider picture of achieving full individual potential, learning for growth and change, communication within and across cultures, and participation in social and economic opportunities. It is linked to both the global and the local, as locally meaningful literacy learning and use also offer access to global horizons. In today's societies, where knowledge and the processing of information are increasingly the means of social mobility and economic progress, learning throughout life is the norm, and literacy is a key to doing so.

85. This agenda reaches beyond the end of the Decade in 2012. It looks to the long term as literacy use evolves, requiring new skills and sustained commitment to patterns of lifelong learning.

A. Learning from experience

86. The following overarching lessons and challenges emerging from the first half of the Decade provide the basis for renewing and orienting action in the second half:

(a) At the global level, the challenge of literacy inequalities remains undiminished. Without increased commitment to adult literacy, targets for reduction in literacy rates will be unreachable in many countries due to demographic considerations, intergenerational effects and poor-quality schooling.

[8] Studies have been carried out in the Netherlands and Switzerland, and one is currently (2008) being undertaken in Latin America on this issue.

(b) Ensuring adequate and appropriate provision to diverse population groups will require that improvements in mass literacy not be accompanied by decreasing linguistic and cultural diversity of minority and indigenous groups. In addition, provision for women, young people and rural populations is often inadequate.

(c) Progress on adult literacy policy has been hesitant. While noting in some contexts increased policy commitment (and financial support) for education, commitment to adult literacy has been considerably less than to primary education.

(d) The delivery and management of literacy programmes include three main challenges: (a) to improve national-level literacy development strategies and coordination to ensure adequate coverage and targeting; (b) to ensure quality programmes which are based on the needs of the learner; (c) to improve monitoring and financial planning mechanisms.

(e) There is currently a high (and largely unmet) demand for technical and financial assistance to enhance research capabilities in adult literacy, particularly in the countries with the most severe literacy challenges. Literacy programmes are increasingly informed by formative research, while research on benefits is widely viewed as necessary to inform "evidence-based" policy.

(f) The scale of funding for adult literacy is insufficient for the size and nature of the task.

B. Shaping the literacy agenda: the next five years and beyond

87. In order to shape the literacy agenda, there is an urgent need for renewed momentum, with fresh and innovative ideas and a clearly articulated vision. In the light of the General Assembly's call[9] to all stakeholders in literacy to enhance their commitment and action in support of the Decade, it is imperative that

(a) Member States give literacy higher priority within their educational planning and budgeting, strengthening national and subnational professional institutions and fostering greater collaboration among all literacy partners;

(b) UNESCO continue to strengthen its coordinating and catalysing role, and that it draw on the results of this mid-Decade review and on the outcomes of the 2007-2008 regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy to develop a strategic framework for renewed cooperation and action in literacy, in cooperation with international partners in literacy, including the agencies of the United Nations system;

(c) The international community deepen its collective commitment to literacy, with greater integration into international development targets, such as the Millennium Development Goals, and intensify efforts to implement the UNLD International Plan of Action.

88. The next five years (2008-2012) must focus on making a difference in the three major areas described below, forming the basis for strategic development and subsequent action:

[9] See resolution 61/140.

1. Stronger commitment

89. The 774 million adults without literacy skills, while heterogeneous in their characteristics, constitute as a whole a group that needs greater attention, with particular concern to addressing issues of gender, young people and marginalization. It is not until there is, on the one hand, a much stronger consciousness of the educational injustice which such adults suffer and, on the other, a stronger conviction of the benefits of literacy and the costs of illiteracy that there will be a change of policy. This will require:

(a) Advocacy on a much bigger scale, based on the right to basic education, the right to development, the essential need for literacy in today's knowledge-based economy, and the fundamental value of literacy as an indispensable tool for further learning opportunities in the framework of lifelong learning;

(b) Clear policy formulation on literacy as part of the education sector, particularly at the national level, based on attested evidence and building on standard-setting, quality assessment and benchmarking;

(c) Improving assessment, monitoring and evaluation of literacy to ensure efficient policymaking and planning for literacy and the monitoring of the progress made towards policy objectives as well as the implementation of literacy programmes;

(d) Stronger partnerships and alliances at the national, regional and international levels based on a common vision of the role of literacy, on mutual support and comparative advantage.

2. More effective delivery on the ground

90. This report underlines the tough challenges of programme design and delivery, calling for a determination to orient national and international support to the needs and characteristics of communities. Capacity development at all levels is a critical dimension of effective literacy provision, which will also require:

(a) Documentation and dissemination: improving the collection, dissemination and use of information on effective practices and policies and providing a platform for knowledge exchange;

(b) Increasing the scale and quality of delivery, while adapting management systems, teaching methods and materials to respond to diverse contexts and needs, with approaches that involve high levels of community participation;

(c) Enriching the literate environment, through the promotion of authorship, printed and electronic materials, publishing and distribution;

(d) Capacity development in all aspects of literacy, from material production and facilitator training to management, monitoring, evaluation, research and planning;

(e) Research to provide evidence-based data to policymakers demonstrating the benefits of literacy skills as well as information on factors that contribute to the quality of provision and outcomes of literacy programmes.

3. New resources for literacy

91. This report has identified the low level of funding for adult literacy as a key constraint in achieving the goals of the Decade; urgent action is required, particularly:

(a) Increased allocation of funds for adult literacy: dedication of at least 3 per cent of national education budgets for adult literacy and increased financial support to achieve this from bilateral and multilateral donor organizations;

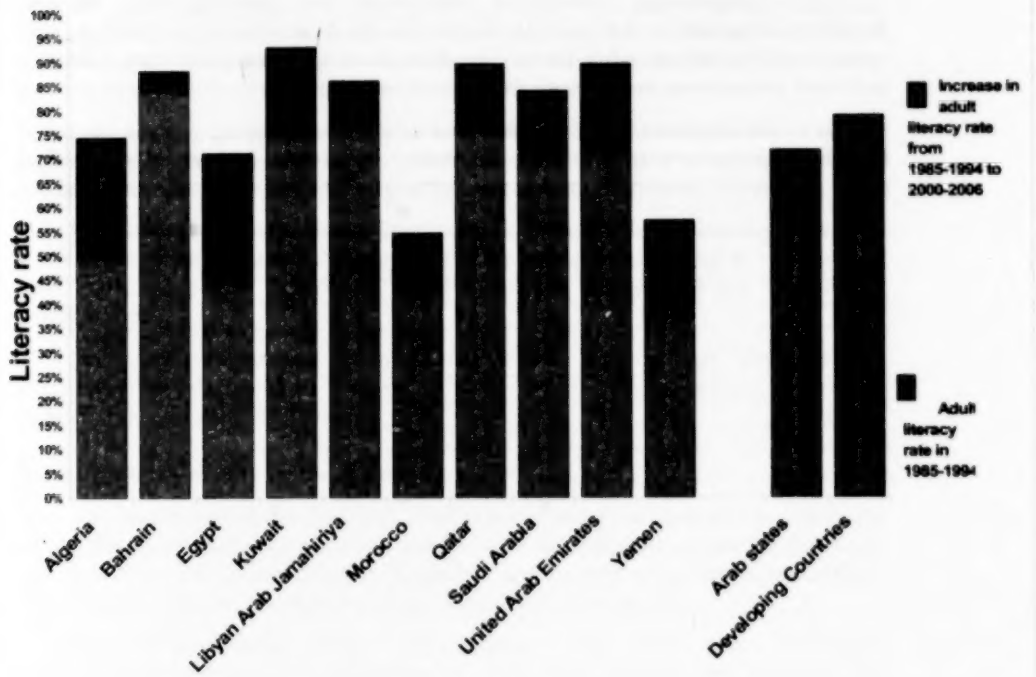
(b) Strengthening institutional mechanisms for financing adult literacy: flexible mechanisms to facilitate provision through diverse providers, with a clear commitment to include adult literacy investments in the EFA Fast Track Initiative and other institutional mechanisms for poverty reduction;

(c) Development of new models and databases on literacy programme costs, including components of provision, to enable comparison of literacy programme costs, and greater adaptation to meet the challenge of diverse needs and contexts.

Annex

Adult (15+) regional literacy rates (1985-1994 to 2000-2006)[a]

Figure 1
Increase over time in Arab States' adult literacy rate



[a] The charts show countries for which comparative data were available for the periods indicated and at the time of compiling this report.

Figure 2
Increase over time in Central and Eastern European adult literacy rate

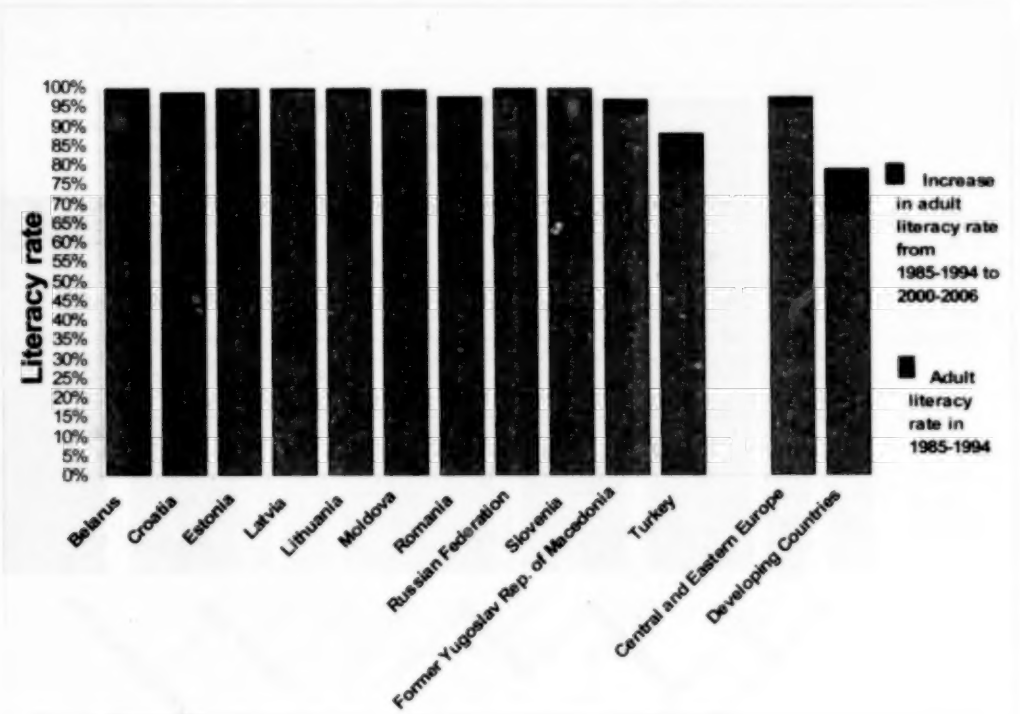


Figure 3
Increase over time in Central Asian adult literacy rate

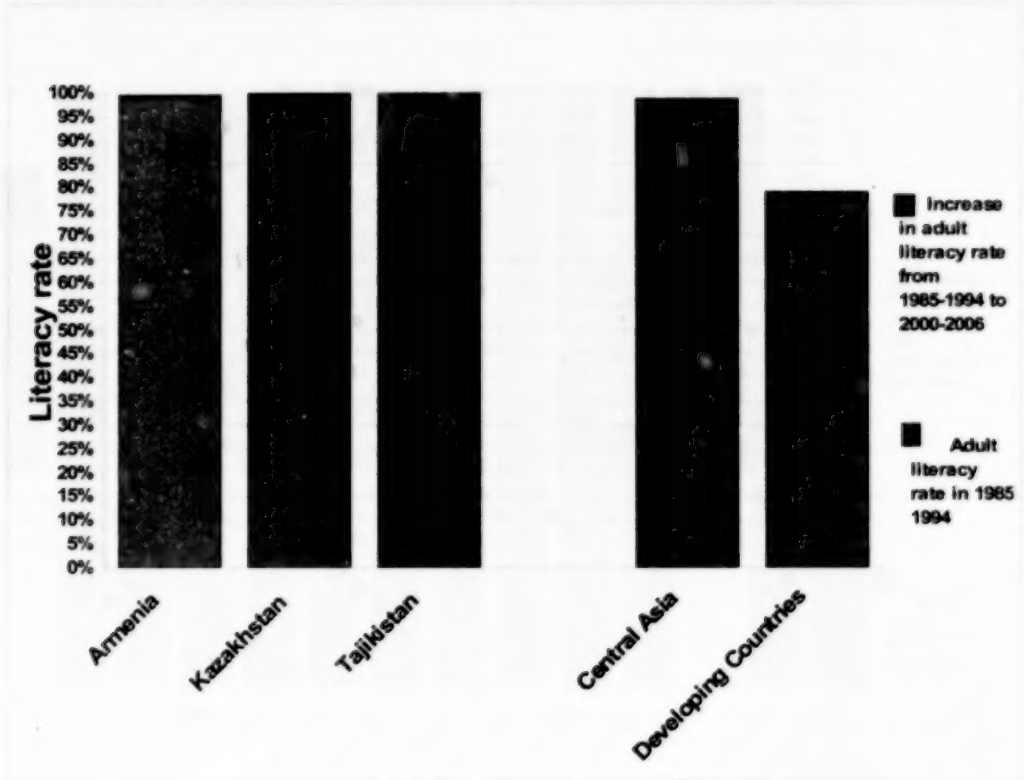


Figure 4
Increase over time in East Asian and Pacific adult literacy rate

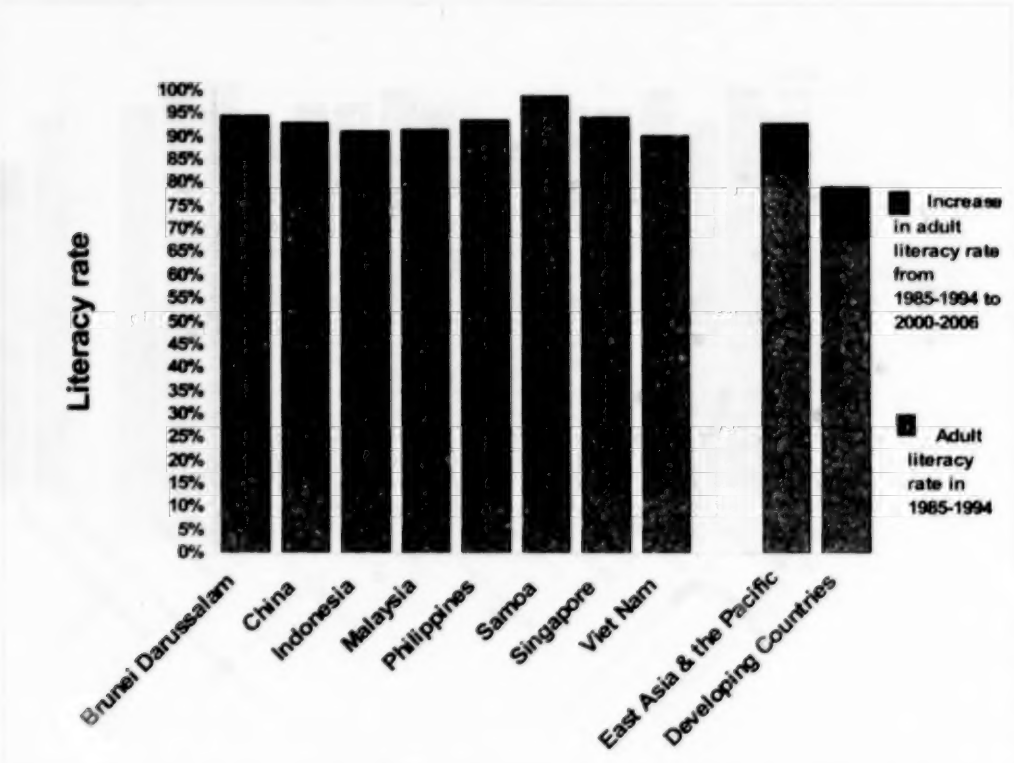


Figure 5
Increase over time in Latin American and the Caribbean adult literacy rate

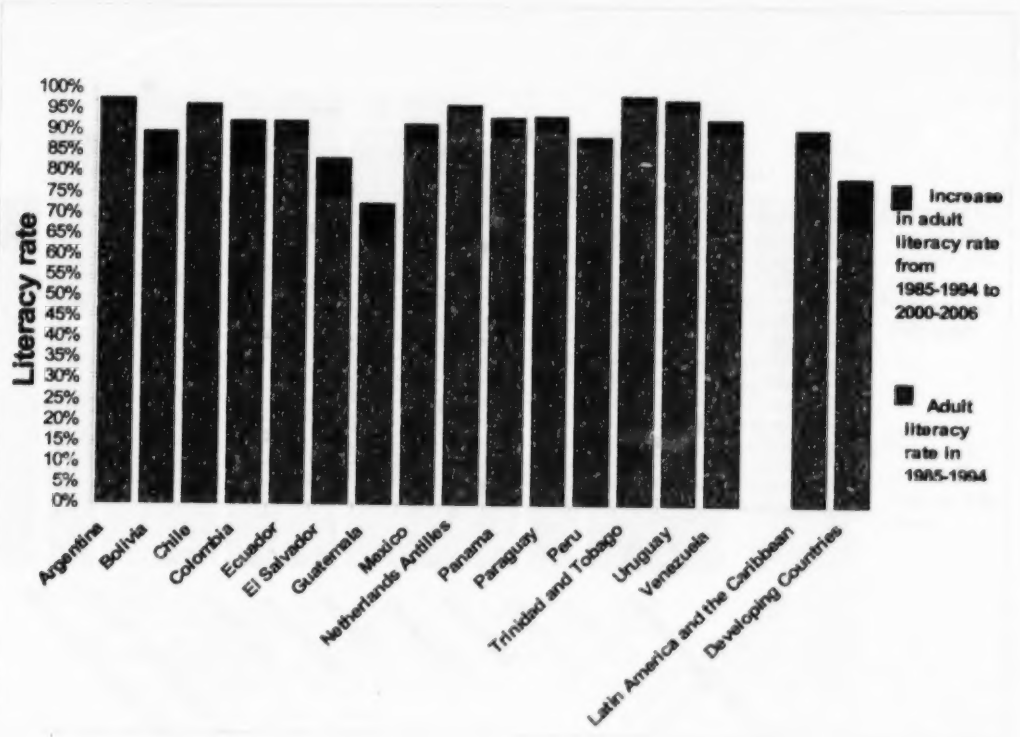


Figure 6
Increase over time in South and West Asian adult literacy rate

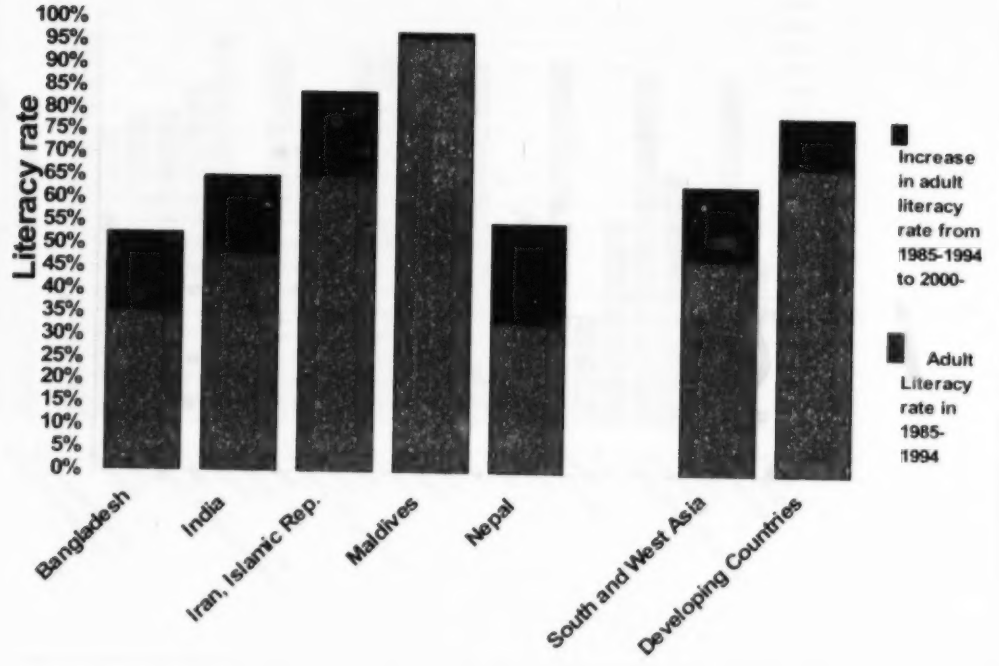


Figure 7
Increase over time in sub-Saharan African adult literacy rate